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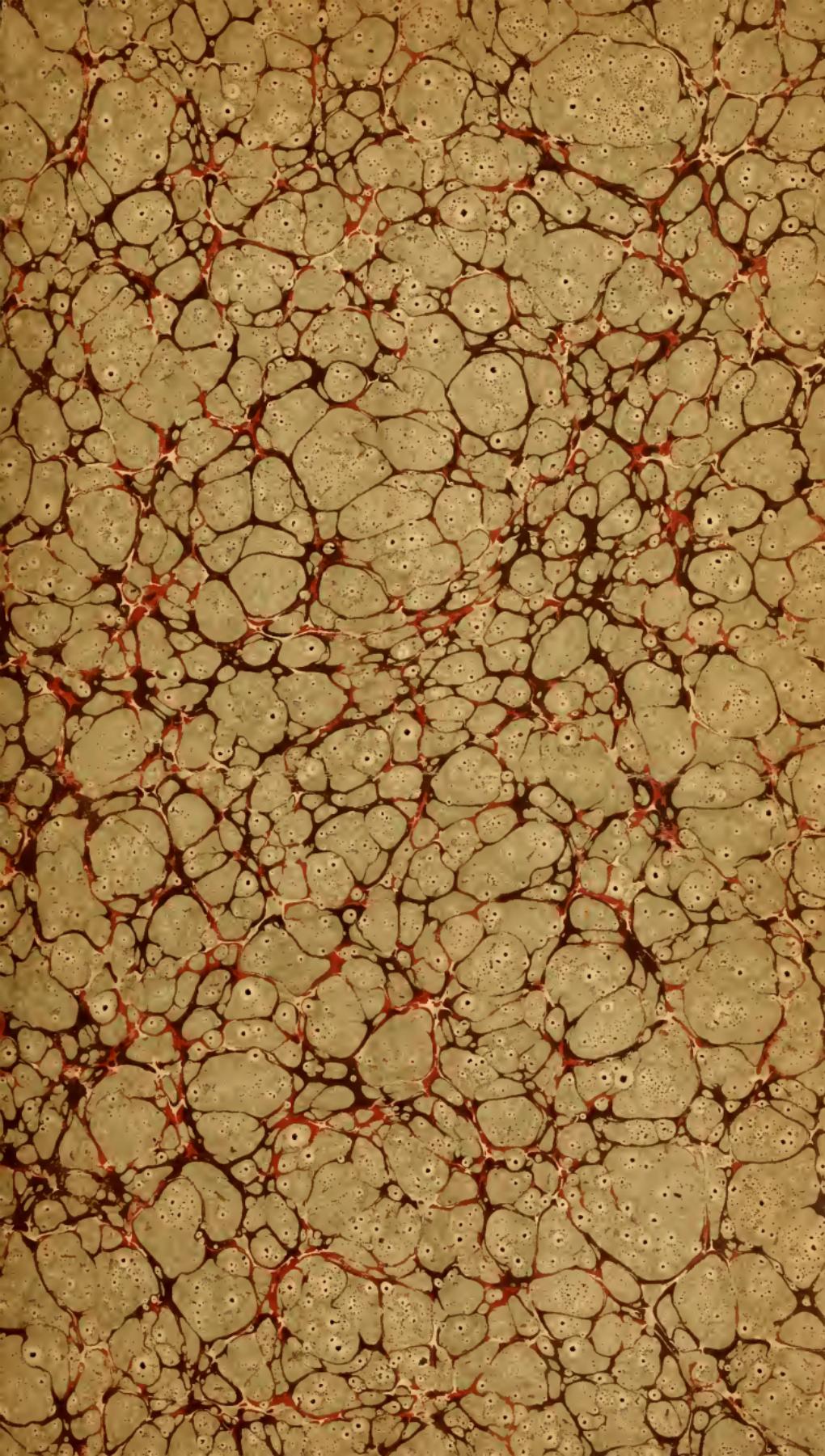


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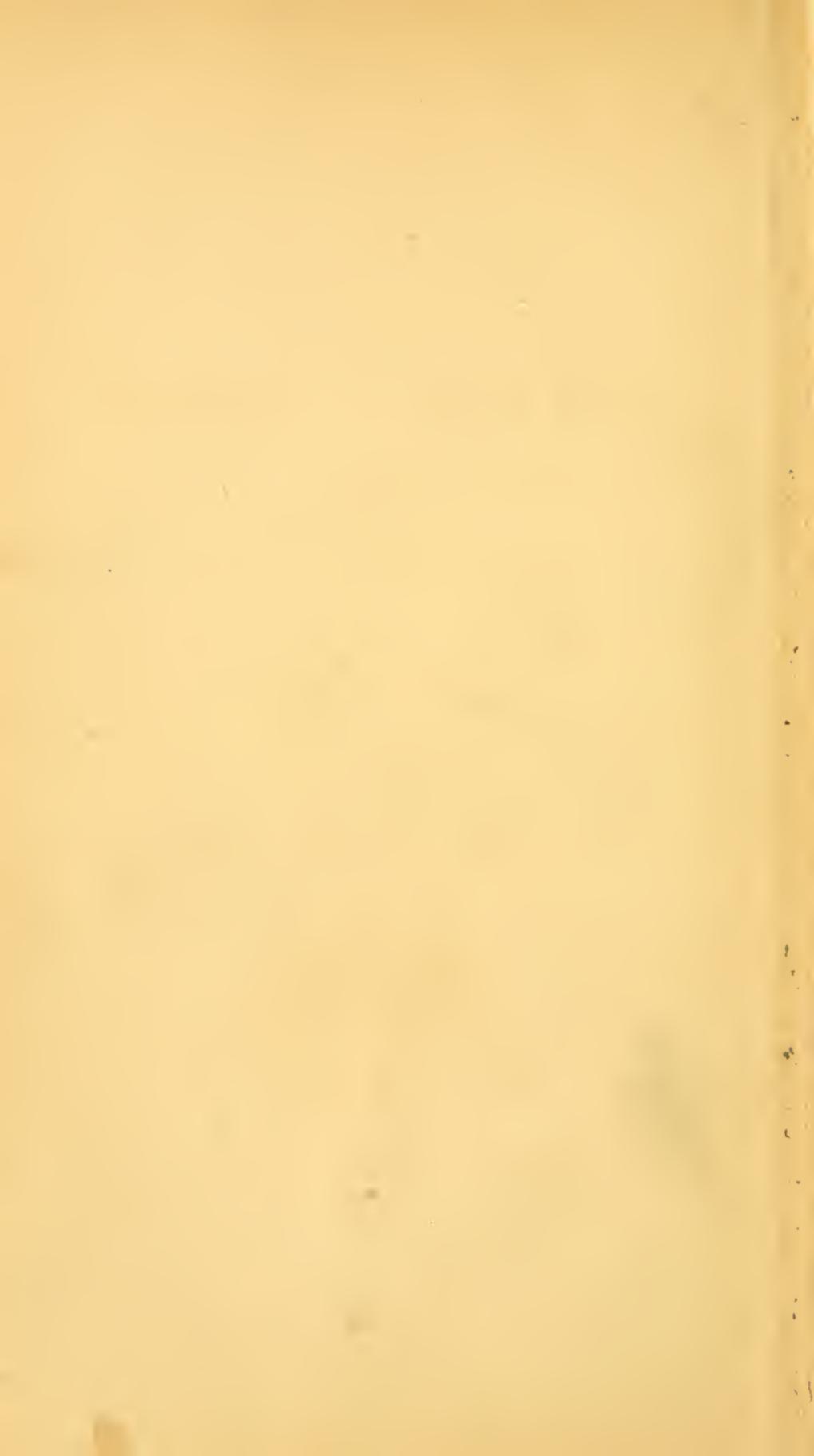
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THE
ITALIAN BRIDE.

A PLAY—IN FIVE ACTS.

By Sam'l Yates Levy

Written for MISS ELIZA LOGAN, and published
for private distribution.



SAVANNAH:
JOHN M. COOPER & CO.
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MEN Sept. 27, 1921

DEDICATION.

TO MY FATHER:

This first emanation from a mind, which
it has always been his care and delight to cherish
and improve, is affectionately
Dedicated.

Savannah, 1856.

THE ITALIAN BRIDE.

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ.

CLODIO RENALDI—A young Venetian, poor but of noble family.

HUGO DI CORELLI—His friend, a powerful noble.

LORENZO D'ARPA—A dissolute noble and gamester.

GIOVANNI—A wealthy merchant, father to Venetia.

ALBERTO FRANGIPANI—Captain of the Guard.

DOGE OF VENICE.

FRIAR.

ANTONIO—Servant to Giovanni.

PESCARA— }
DANDOLO— } Senators and members of the Council.

EXECUTIONER.

VENETIA—Daughter to Giovanni, betrothed to Clodio.

FRANCESCA—Her cousin.

ATTENDANTS, GUARDS, OFFICERS, NOBLES, &c.

The scene is laid in Venice.



THE ITALIAN BRIDE.

ACT I.

SCENE 1.—*A Street in Venice.*

Enter Clodio and Hugo, meeting.

Hugo. Why, how now, Clodio ! On thy brow sits joy,
And as thou walk'st along thy spirit seems
So light and airy as to spurn the earth
And all the dull mortality it bears.
Come, whither go'st thou with that happy face ?

Clodio. A happy face reflects a happy heart :
I go, my friend, to old Giovanni's house ;
A casket which enshrines my only gem,
But one so bright, so rare, so pure withal
That earth's most mighty potentate might wish

To grace his crown with such—and wish in vain,
For the world boasts no other gem like mine !

Hugo. Oh, thou'rt in love, and, being so, wouldst swear
Thy lady-love perfection, and adorn'd
With ev'ry virtue, grace angelical.
Thou'd'st say the morning dew-drop, crystal-clear,
Is not so liquid as her azure eye ;
The ruby pales before her glowing lip,
And the pure pearl upon her snowy neck
Darkens with rage to find itself surpass'd :
A crown could add no lustre to that brow
Where the bright jewels of her eyes are set,
And ev'ry virtue which could grace high heav'n
Seeks a retreat within Venetia's breast.
Oh Cludio, Cludio, how I pity thee !

Cludio. And why ?

Hugo. Because I see thou art in love.

Trust me a lover sees not with his eyes ;

But blind and dazzled by his passion's glare,
And all his senses in confusion lost,
He sees and listens thro' the heart alone.
So all thy sense is gather'd to thy heart !

Clodio. I would not have it elsewhere : I would trust
Soul, thought, life, sense, heart—ev'rything on earth,..
Aye, and hereafter to her guardian care.
Believe me, Hugo, 'tis a worthy trust :—
For there is not a surer path to Heav'n
Than where a virtuous wife points out the way,
And leading gently down the path of life,
Makes Love the guide to Immortality.

Hugo. Now, by Saint Mark, love makes the eloquent !
But who comes here with such disordered steps,
And with such fury flashing from his eyes ?
'Tis that foul stain on fair Nobility,
The by-word of all Venice, base Lorenzo.

Clodio. To judge his looks, fresh from some drunken [brawl..

Hugo. Or it may be, perchance, that he hath left,
His loaded dice at home, and keener rogues
Have spoil'd him of his plunder.

Cludio. Hold, he comes—

(Enter LORENZO hastily: they regard him coldly.)

Lorenzo. Give ye good day, fair Signors: by my faith
Methinks ye look but coldly on my greeting.
How, Signor Cladio! With the fairest bride
And the most wealthy that our City boasts,
Hast thou no smile to greet a friend withal?
Thy fortune, Sir, should make thee complaisant.

Cludio. (Coldly.)

I thank thee, Sir!

Lorenzo. (Sneeringly.)

So, so—thou thankest me:
Then thank thee for thy thanks, and so we're quits:
I owe thee nothing for thy courtesy.

"I thank thee, Sir"—good faith, thou speak'st as though

The blood of Arpa did not run as pure
As that Corelli or Renaldi boasts.

Hugo. The gen'rous blood of Arpa did run pure
And bright as crystal, while thy noble sire
Vicentio D'Arpa bore that honor'd name:
When with bold heart and ever ready blade,
He fired the breasts of all the noble youth
'Gainst Istria's savage crew. Then was the time
That Arpa's spotless 'scutcheon was as fair
As any proud Nobility could boast:
'Twas an estate which each aspiring soul
Strove hard to emulate! That time is past.

Lorenzo. I thank thee Sir! and they indeed speak true
Who tell in wonder of thy eloquence.
Thou heraldest the praises of my house
With such sincerity and noble zeal

As well might gain the hearts of all its sons :
And for the veneration that I bear
My honor'd Father's mem'ry I o'erlook
The ill-disguised offence thy words imply.

Hugo. He quickly sees offence, who merits it.—

Cludio, we must begone : good morrow, Sir.

(*Exeunt Cludio and Hugo.*)

Lorenzo. Now may ten thousand torments tear their hearts !

Am I deformed—less fair than other men—
Less brave—a fool or what?—Twice scorn'd to-day !
Once by these upstart Lords, whose house to mine
Is as the heath-furze to the spreading oak :
Their scorn I well can bear : it rankles not. (*Laughs.*)
But this plebeian dog, who spurn'd my suit—
Aye, there's the thorn which festers in my pride,
A bitter pain, no balm can cure save blood.
The base and low-born churl, to scorn *my* suit !
Too great an honor for his common blood.

And oh, what wounds me worse, this smooth-faced
spark,

Sleek Signor Cludio, takes the golden prize.

Let them beware! For the same blood which once
Urg'd stern Vicentio to his daring deeds
Boils hotly in these veins, and outraged pride
Lashes the steeds of passion madly on,
Laughing to scorn the barriers of the law.

Let them beware, or ere the wedding bells
Chime gayly to the feast, they yet may know
He triumphs not, whom Arpa calls a foe.

(*Exit.*)

SCENE. II.—*A Room in GIOVANNI'S House.*

Giovanni. Thus have I won the goal of all my hopes!
The wish'd for end, which thro' long years of toil
I watch'd with hope, scarce hoping 't would be
reach'd.

As when the seaman from a long sojourn
'Midst wintry tempests and the boist'rous seas

Which gird the struggling ocean's farthest verge,
Views from afar the well-known, long-lov'd port,
Around which center'd ev'ry happy dream,—
So here I cast the anchor of my hopes,
Blest with the thought that the dear child, whose
love

Gemm'd my poor life with brightness not its own,
Will wed one worthy of her: one whose eye
Can watch the gathering clouds of stormy life
And with unquailing soul and fearless hand
Ward off the threaten'd ill. My task is o'er,
And to the quiet portals of the grave
I may direct my steps. Good morrow, son !

(Enter CLODIO.)

'Twas even now my thoughts were bent on thee.—
I would detain thee but a little time
From our Venetia, who with longing heart
Awaits thy coming.

Clodio. Say on, good Father.

Giovanni. I am an aged man and the last drops
Are ebbing slowly from my vase of life.
To-morrow's eve will see my child thy bride !
Oh, guard her well : fence round her happiness
With all the bulwarks of the tend'rest love :
Be thou the skilful engineer to rear
The strong defences of her future fate :
Let the sweet mem'ry of a thousand acts
Of loving kindness cheer her thro' the world :
So that at last when fate has done its worst
And the cold gifts of age shall grace thy brow,
Thou still may'st own that priceless gem of gems
A worthy woman's love !

Clodio. Trust me I will !

Thou couldst not speak a theme to which my heart
Could e'er respond more gladly than to this.
Oh, my whole life shall be to live for her,
And ev'ry beauteous flow'r which doth bloom
Within life's garden will I pluck to weave

A peerless wreath to crown her happiness.

Giovanni. I doubt it not, but still a father's love
Is ever tim'rous in a daughter's cause.

Like the rash merchant who hath ventured all
The hard-earn'd gains of many toilsome years
In one last crowning voyage, so I trust
The cherish'd Bark of my heart's darling hopes,
Bearing the rich freight of my life's whole love,
To an untravers'd sea. Nay, speak not yet!
I know what thou would'st say and am content!
But tell me now, my Lord; hast thou e'er seen
A temper so controll'd, so soft, so sweet,
As our Venetia has?

Clodio. Why ask me this?

He questions not for knowledge who doth know
The answer 'ere 'tis spoken. Those calm eyes,
That quiet bosom and that placid face
Too truly show a heav'n of rest within,

Where the fierce gust of passion never flaws
The smiling waters of her peaceful soul.

Giovanni. Why what a thing is Love, that thinks
because

The sky to-day is bright, 't will never cloud.

(*He leads Clodio to the Casement.*)

See'st thou, my Lord, how tranquilly and calm
The Adriatic's smiling waters sleep?

Let but the East wind blow and the fierce gusts
Will rouse a Titan in those slumb'ring depths.

That Titan's but an infant to the storm

Which a strong passion instant would awake
Within the peaceful heart Venetia owns.

Clodio. I never shall believe it, 'till mine eyes
Shall for themselves discern this flaw, you say
Doth stain this priceless gem.

Giovanni. Then may thine eyes

Be blind forever, Cludio! 'Tis no slight
And petty cause of sorrow that would hurl
From his high seat the Angel who sits thron'd
Presiding o'er the meekness of her soul:
But some great woe, some mighty source of ill,
Which would sweep rudely o'er the mind's sweet
harp

And crash harsh discord; and in all things else
She is as exquisite as is the bud,
Blushing beneath the kiss of morn's sweet dews
And bursting into flow'r. Thus her mother was,
And thus I lost her. Never let her know
The Lord Lorenzo sought her guileless hand,
Else—

Cludio. Ha! He seek *her* hand, licentious wretch!—
The very thought is rank with misery!

He dare to seek *her* hand, whose ev'ry thought—

Giovanni. Nay, then, let it pass; I thought thou'dst
known it.

Clodio. He seek her hand, when e'en the gondoliers
Who throng the quay, cry "shame" upon his life:
For lips like his, corrupt with dicers' oaths,
Only to breathe her name were sacrilege.

Giovanni. Tush, let it pass! I pray thee heed it not.
In giving thee Venetia, I bestow
The one fresh flow'ret in the wither'd wreath
That crowns my time-blanch'd brow. The worldly
wealth
I have, I destine for you both, so soon
As earth shall close upon me. This parchment
Secures the gift.

(*He gives a parchment to Clodio, who after some hesitation takes it and places it in his bosom.*)

Clodio. My thanks for this would be
Framing my lips to words already made
By thee familiar to them. May Heav'n grant
That many years yet smile upon thy life,
Bearing upon their wings unclouded joy,

'Ere I become the gainer by thy bounty.

But whither go'st thou?

Giovanni. To the Ducal Palace!

The State hath need of moneys and my word
Is pledg'd to furnish them unto the Doge.

Clodio. I do entreat thee go not out to-day!

I pray thee do not go.

Giovanni. Not go, and why?

Clodio. 'Tis but an hour since I met Lorenzo—
And in his eyes there was a dev'lish gleam
Of hate and malice; he doth love thee not
And is a base bad man, whose words of hate
Are couch'd in dagger-blows, and in his spite
Thy gray hairs, Father, which would be as bars
Of solid iron 'fore an honest arm,
Would but incite *his* bloody nature on.
I pray thee do not go: nay, if thou wilt,
Let me go with thee!

Giovanni. These are boyish fears.

Let thee go with me? Aye, and if thou dost
A pretty coil would our Venetia make
'Gainst her old Father. Nay, cold Lover, stay;
I'll make thee woo her if thou wilt or not.

Clodio. If thou *wilt* go, at least accept my dagger.
Indeed, indeed, thou must.

Giovanni. Pshaw! This is folly.

Well, well then, foolish boy, if 't must be so,—
I'll take the plaything: so now, fare thee well.
To night, I'll meet thee on the Rialto.

(*Exit.*)

Clodio. I would he had not gone abroad to-day!
A dark foreboding flutters round my mind,
And ever as I turn to thoughts of love,—
Minist'ring Angels at Venetia's shrine—
Flaps its dark wings across my spirit's light,
And shoots its poison, curdling in my heart..

The cup of bliss is mantling at my lips,
And ever as I strive to quaff its sweetness,
This nameless horror shudders thro' my soul
And blights the flow'rs on the goblets's brim.
I've hear'd of dim presentiments which lurk
In the dark hidden chambers of the brain,
And, like a skeleton at gorgeous feasts,
Stare ghastly in the face of each bright thought
And scare it from its mirth : until Fate comes,
The dreadful priest, who weds this tort'ring sprite
To terrible reality. Oh Heav'n,
If these dark vapors which infest my soul
Rise from the future's black and mystic tarn,
The dumb precursors of some monstrous ill—
Spare, spare *her* guiltless head ! on me alone,
Let the fell tide of fierce misfortune dash,
But save *her* from the wreck ! Away, away,
Ye dread Tormentors : my Venetia comes,
And as the Sun doth sweep among the clouds

Which veil his glorious presence, so the mists
Which cloud my joy, flee hastening before
The brightness of her beauty. My own Love!

(Enter VENETIA and FRANCESCA.)

Venetia. (Gayly.)

Thy own Love? He speaks of love, Francesca:
The tardy loit'rer, to whom time is wing'd
While he stays absent from Venetia's side.
Love haunts the soul with the ideal presence
Of the lov'd, and gives the eyes no comfort,
Save when they rest upon the object lov'd:—
Why, Love is like two flow'rets on one stem,
Which bloom and shed their perfume on the air
But for each-other's happiness and joy.—
'Tis like two wavelets on a sunny sea,
Which melt in murmur'ring music into one,
And leave no witness of their former being.
Such being Love, thou'rt no true Knight of his
Or thou hadst been here full an hour ago!

Clodio. And so I should, fair Judge, had it not
chanc'd
Thy Father stay'd my steps.

Francesca. I've hear'd it said
An Ocean could not stay impetuous Love,—
And that he laughs to scorn each barrier strong
That human means uprear against his will.
Ply him with that, Venetia.

Venetia. Nay, I would
Not set my father's bidding 'gainst my will.
But surely all the morning was thine own
To meet my father, if he wish'd thy presence.

Francesca. Nay, I will hear no more apology
From such a recreant in the cause of love;
So, fare-ye-well.

(*Exit FRANCESCA.*)

Clodio. This, then, is my excuse;—
I went this morning, when the day just smiled—

As smiles an infant, waking from sweet sleep,—
To the fair gardens of a noble lord
To gather flowers for their lovely queen.
The dewy Night had sooth'd the winds to rest,
And Venice slumber'd on her island couch
As sleeps some lovely sea-nymph on the waves.
Far in the eastern sky the smiling Dawn
Drew Night's dark mantle from her blushing face,
And mourning Nature dried her falling tears
To greet the approaching light, her heav'n-born
Lord.
While yet I look'd, uprose the lazy Sun
And from each tree and bow'r struck the gems
Which Night had scatter'd with her lavish hand;
While to his worship rose the perfumes fresh
The blue-eyed Morn had brought—and from the
throats
Of tiny chorists rose the morning hymn.
Oh, the whole air was bright with peace and love;

And, in the holy stillness of that hour,
Thou stood'st upon the margin of my soul,
And all its crystal depths were full of thee
And mirror'd back thy image. Lost in thought
And the fair hopes which gem the golden future,
I loiter'd heedless, and untiring Time
On silent pinions wing'd his speedy course :
But all the while I was with thee, Venetia,
And my soul spoke to thine in heav'nly chords
Struck by Love's master-hand.

Venetia. My own dear Lord !

'Twas but in idle pleasantry I seem'd
To doubt thy love, which if I did in truth
The doubt were death. 'Tis a strange thing, this
love,

Which comes upon us like a fairy dream
And steals us from ourselves, so that we live
But for another.

Cludio. Love riots amid flow'rs !

Should winter's icy breathing blast the flow'rs
Would Love still smile?

Venetia. Aye, else he were not Love:

I speak but for myself and the sweet sprite
Which dwells within my heart and whispers softly
That thou art all my hope and joy on earth:
That without thee I die: but, by thy side,
Thro' the whole world, there is no spot so dark
Thy presence would not fill with joy and light;
And should misfortune come—

Cludio. Aye, think of that;

Would'st thou still love?

Venetia. Until my heart should burst
In guarding thee from ill: then bless the fate
That let me share it with thee, and then—die!
Cludio, I was but yesterday a girl
From whose young soul had just begun to rise
The stars that shine and rule o'er woman's fate.

There was a sad vague yearning in my heart
For something that I knew not, and my life
Grew weary for this treasure that I sought.

I knew not what it was : I only knew
I wish'd for something that I could not find
To still the restless murmurs of my soul.

At last thou cam'st and straight upleapt my heart
And from its inmost chambers rose a glass
Thro' which I saw thee perfect : oh, it seem'd
As if the essence of a new-born soul
Sprang up within me and cast forth a light
Which bath'd all nature in an amber flood.

When thou wert near, eyes, ears, each other sense,
Were center'd all on thee, as 'twere for life ;
But when away, each thought was bent on thee,
And still I saw thee ever 'fore my eyes
Reflected in the mirror of my soul
Until thou cam'st to be a part of self—
And in each air of heav'n I hear'd thy voice
And saw thy face in nature ev'ry where.

Thus the great space within my heart was fill'd,
And all my life hung trembling on thy will.

Clodio. Speak on, speak on, sweet Angel, till the air,
Laden with love, grows fragrant of thy words.
Oh, there is something in a woman's love
So pure, so free from all the dross of earth,
That e'en the thought of being so belov'd
Is joy ineffable! I sometimes think
My love for thee is sinful in its zeal,
And that some monstrous ill,—I know not what,—
Will freeze this gush of joy which fills my soul.

Venetia. Why, what an idle fear! Has't come to this,
That thou, whose name is wont to be a spell,
With which the Turkish mothers awe their babes—
Whose lance is ever foremost in the lists—
Whom Venice counts among her stoutest knights—
Should pine and pale before an unseen ill,
Like a sick girl who trembles at each thought
Her fancy conjures up: if it be thus,

When we are wed, good sooth, I will assume
Thy coat of spanish steel, thy trusty sword,
And thou shalt be the old wife by the hearth,
Arm'd with the dread command of household keys.
How now?

(Enter ANTONIO.)

Antonio. Mistress Francesca bade me say,
Thy Father hath sent hither divers jewels
That thou mayst choose withal.

Venetia. I come anon !

(Exit ANTONIO.)

Come, dearest Cludio, hie thee in with me
And help me choose these gems. Cast from thy
mind

These sad forebodings of imagined ill
And be thyself once more,—ah, this is well !
Thou smilest now as thou art wont to smile.
Come, come, my *wedding* jewels, Cludio !

(*Exeunt.*)

END OF ACT I.

ACT II.

SCENE I.—*On the grand Canal—The Rialto in the distance; Time Night.*

A Dagger Sheath lies on the Stage. Enter CLODIO and an attendant.

Clodio. Go to Lord Hugo and commend me to him;
Tell him from me, if it suits well his leisure,
I fain would see his lordship in the morn.

(*Attendant Bows and Exit.*)

How stately walks the softly treading Night,
Like a young maiden, star-eyed, ebon-crown'd:
With a sweet pity, veiling from the sight
The batter'd towers whose enseamed breasts
Are deeply scarr'd with ages past of crime.
The gentle, quiet Night! I love her well
As she comes resting on the whisp'ring breeze,
Lull'd by the chanting of the murm'ring waves,
Greeting her presence far o'er the Lagune.
Oh beauteous Night, to-morrow thou wilt come
To smile on us alone.—

(*He strikes the Dagger Sheath with his foot.*)

What have we here

Sparkling so brightly, when all else is dark?

(*He picks up the Sheath.*)

A dagger sheath and jewell'd as the sky

In southern climes is starr'd. There: rest thou

there!

(*Puts the Sheath in his Bosom.*)

A guarantee of fickle Fortune's favor.

I do remember an Astrologer

Who told me once in Florence, if I found

Aught of great value, I should cast it from me,

As being but a snare of treach'rous fortune.

So let the gray-beard act—that will not I.

Why, Fortune hath bestow'd on me Venetia,

A treasure of such price that all the world—

ALBERTO FRANGIPANI, *within*

What ho! Secure the ways, close ev'ry path!

Stop all who wish to pass ! Oh, 'tis most foul !

(Enter ALBERTO, *a bloody dagger in his hand,*
attended by Guards and Torch-bearers.)

Clodio. What means this dreadful outcry ?

Alberto. Good my Lord,
A thing to call down vengeance on all Venice.
Poor old Giovanni lies on yonder quay,
Struck to the heart and welt'ring in his blood :—
I drew this dagger from the wound myself.

Clodio. Merciful Heav'n ! Arrest Lorenzo D'Arpa !

Alberto. The Lord of Arpa ! Have you any proofs ?
This is a dreadful crime and 'twere not right
That accusation 'gainst a noble Lord
Should rest on slight foundation. Have you seen
(To the Guards.)

The Lord Lorenzo on your rounds to-night ?

Clodio. Nay, pardon me : 'Twas but a sudden thought—

Oh, who will give this to Venetia's ears?
You say, you found him dead? Gave he no sign
By which to know who did this dreadful deed?

Alberto. None, none at all! He lay all cold and dead,
His white hair dabbled in a pool of blood,—
His stony eyes fixed on the sky above:
It is a fearful thing, an old man's blood!

(*The Guards look at Clodio and whisper.*)

Clodio. Aye, 'tis a fearful thing, for when we see 't
We think upon our Fathers: age is holy
And shedding age's blood is sacrilege.
Why whisper ye, and look upon me thus?

(*To the Guards.*)

If I can help ye in this dreadful coil—

A Guard. My Lord, my Lord, there's blood upon
thy vest.

Alberto. By heav'n 'tis so,—and on his hands too,
look!

Blood scarcely dry! My lord, whence came those stains?

(*Clodio looks at his hands confounded—a pause.*)
Speak, speak, my lord; whence comes that fearful dye?

Clodio, (looking at his hands.)

Oh gracious heav'n, help me in my need!
Santa Maria, have the fiends of hell
The power thus to trap a christian man?
Indeed, indeed, I know not whence it came:
'Tis magic, sorc'ry; 'tis the devil's work.

Alberto. (Gravely.)

Aye, that I well believe.

Clodio. The dagger sheath:—

It must be that: I found it even now.

(*He takes out the sheath, and, at the same time,
the parchment falls unobserved.*)

Doubtless 'twas bloody and hath soil'd me thus.

Alberto, (taking the sheath.)

See how the dagger fits it just and true
And tallies with it e'en in ornament.
Why, look ye here! Now, by the air I breathe,
His arms and cypher graven on the hilt.
Is not this confirmation positive?

Clodio. 'Tis true it is my dagger: it is mine!

But I did lend it to the poor old man
And have not seen it since, until this moment.

Alberto. It may be so: I trust thou'l prove it so:—
I am not thine accuser or thy judge
And hope thou'l make thine innocence appear.
But, oh my lord, if thou art guilty of
This damning crime, go bid farewell to hope,
For nature veils her eyes from such a deed!

(Enter HUGO.)

Hugo. I'm glad to meet thee, Clodio! There goes out
A cry about the town—"Giovanni's slain:"

Hast thou hear'd aught of this?

Alberto. 'Tis true, my lord.

Hugo. And does suspicion point to no arrest?

Alberto. Thou'l not believe it; but, there stands the man.

(*Points to Clodio.*)

Hugo. What, art thou mad? He would not hurt a worm;

He murder him, who fathers his betroth'd!

Go to, this is no subject for a jest!

Alberto, (*showing the dagger.*)

Know'st thou this, my lord?

Hugo. Yes: 'tis Clodio's dagger.

Alberto. It was this dagger then that did the deed: I drew it from the gaping wound, myself.

Hugo. 'Tis not a grain of proof, when brought beside

The honor of the man !

(ALBERTO *spies the parchment and picks it up.*)

Alberto. Look at his hands,—

His dress.

Hugo. Still, still you tell me of no proof :

I'll pledge my life upon his innocence.

Clodio, speak out and give this charge the lie :

Why speak you not ?

Clodio. I am as innocent

As is the angel who doth call him ‘father.’

Hugo. I know thou art ! He never spoke but truth :

(*To ALBERTO, who is reading the parchment.*)

If he were guilty, he would bodily say ’t.

Alberto. Here is the cause which hatch'd this fatal
deed.

My lord, my lord, could'st thou not wait until
The feeble arch which spann'd the old man's life

Had crumbled into nought?

(HUGO takes and reads the parchment.)

Hugo. Oh, shame, shame, shame!

Alberto (to HUGO.)

What moves thee thus, my lord?

Hugo. (Passionately.)

I see it all,

I see it all: and this man was my friend,

My kinsman! One into whose ear I pour'd

Each joy that smiled, each woe that frown'd upon
me:

Whom I made king o'er friendship's balmy realms

And in whose love I liv'd. 'Tis a bad world:

'Tis darker to me now than e'er it was.

I should as soon have thought that Honor's self

Could prove a villain, as that Cludio could.

Cludio. Merciful heaven, Hugo! Thou at least

Dost not believe me guilty of this crime?

Hugo. Peace, peace, oh peace! Speak not a word

to me;

Let me not hear thy voice, else that mine eyes

May show the woman's feeling in my soul.

A poor old man! Oh, 'twas a dastard crime;

Wanting the boldness e'en of villainy.

Clodio. I did it not, by heav'n, I did it not.

Alas, alas; in this, my hour of need,

I am deserted both by God and man.

I will not chide thee, but the time may come

When thou shalt chide thyself—aye, bitterly!

One boon, one last request, I fain would ask.

Thou hast a soft, sweet tongue and thou canst
soothe

The bitterest anguish into kindly weeping:

Go thou and to Venetia break this news

As gently as thou canst: and tell her all!

And when she too shall curse me in her grief

As she perchance may do, tell her my heart

Shall answer with a blessing every curse.

Farewell! Now, Sir, do with me as thou wilt!

(*Exeunt all but HUGO, who looks sadly after them.*)

Hugo. My judgment was in conflict with my heart.

He may be innocent; such things have been

When circumstance would almost point the way

To positive persuasion. Can it be?

No, no, he must be guilty: were he not

I never could have doubted him an instant.

I'm glad he's gone, for when he said 'farewell'—

Despite of my fix'd judgment and conviction,

I could have cast my arms about his neck

And call'd him "brother" still,—now to my task:—

A sad and woeful messenger of death,

Who feels the grief he gives, I sadly go

Charg'd with a double freight of grief and woe.

(*Exit.*)

SCENE II.—*A room in GIOVANNI'S house. Enter VENETIA and FRANCESCA, the latter with a casket of jewels.*

Francesca. How sweetly will thy tresses grace these
gems

Resting amid their wavy folds of gold.

But still I think thou should'st have ta'en the
pearl:—

They do become a bride's appearance well.

Venetia. And so I should, but Cludio bade me take
The diamonds.

Francesca. Yes, and said some stupid thing
About their being dull beside thine eyes.—
Well, diamonds will become a countess' state,
And thou wilt act it well! I must no more
Call thee “Venetia,” but must frame my lips
To say “my lady” and “your ladyship.”
‘T will be no more “Mistress Venetia comes,”
But “clear the way, there, for her ladyship.”

Thou'l act it passing well.—I would some lord
Would please to take a fancy to my face.
Tell me, sweet coz, how didst thou win thy lord?

Venetia. Nay, tell thee, rather, how my lord won
me !

Thou know'st the villa, that my father owns
By our sweet Arno? Thither Cludio eame
When all the State was telling o'er and o'er
His gallantry and valor 'gainst the Turk.
He'd known my father from his boyhood's days,
And there he eame to seek the hue of health
That many a wound had driven from his cheeks.

Francesca. I see it all: and thou wert made his
nurse :

A dang'rous post!

Venetia. I was prepared to see
A rough, stern warrior, with forbidding brow
And with an iron frame; but when I saw

His slender figure and his youthful face,
His manner shy as any timid girl's,
The modesty which redd'n'd in his cheeks
If any prais'd the deeds which he had done,
I could not think that his had been the sword
Which struck so fiercely thro' the Turkish ranks.
A month pass'd by and then with many sighs
He spoke of his departure: still he stay'd
And, speaking still of going, did not go.
Sometimes we walk'd amid 'the long arcades
Of clustering myrtles, in the purple shade
Of a bright golden sun-set, and he spoke
Of the strange sights he'd seen in other climes:
And I did like it best, whene'er he spoke
Most of himself. And then again at night
When the fair moon smil'd calmly on herself
Mirror'd in Arno's bosom, we would glide
In a gay shallop, and the neighb'rинг groves
Would sing an answer to the murmur'd songs
That our two voices gave !

Francesca. In truth, a scene
Where Love delights to dwell.

Venetia. Well, time pass'd by,
And sometimes I could *feel* that Cludio's eyes
Were gazing on my face, and all my soul
Shrank trembling from the watching of his love.
At last, one day we sat upon a bank
Where the spring flow'rs were wrestling with the
grass
To catch a glimpse of heav'n. About us trees
Entwin'd their arms around each others' forms,
A shady arch—an armor of fair green—
Thro' which the sun by many a jagged rent
Struck his bright spear: a softly warbling brook
Went singing love-songs to its green-clad banks,
And the spring-breeze, awak'd at last from sleep,
Came stealing softly from his southern grot,
Laden with sweets.—

(Enter ANTONIO.)

Antonio. Madam, lord Hugo waits
And earnestly beseeches you to see him.

Venetia. Lord Hugo waits ! Keep you lord Cludio's
friend
Dancing attendance in the outer court
As if he were a tradesman's errand boy ?
Go, sirrah ; thou shouldst know thy duty better.

(*Exit ANTONIO.*)

We'll speak of this, Francesca, more anon,
And I shall show thee how this germ of love
Grew to a stately tree, whose ev'ry leaf
Blaz'd in the sun-light of our happiness.

(*Enter HUGO.*)

Good eve, my lord : it is a happy chance
Which brings the noble Hugo to our roof.
I grieve my father is not here to make
His proper duty to your lordship's presence.

Hugo. Lady—I come—

(*He hesitates with emotion.*)

Oh, cruel, cruel chance !

Venetia. How now, my lord ; what is it moves thee thus ?—

I fear me thou art ill :—Francesca, quick—
Send quickly for the leech.

Hugo. Thou'dst send in vain :

No leech can cure the tidings that I bring
Save one who could recall a parted life.

Venetia. Merciful heav'n, what means this, my lord ?
Thou fram'st thy speech in such a mystic way
As thou wouldst have us guess some riddle dark,
Which, it guess'd right, would crush us to the earth..
A parted life ! Oh, noble Hugo, speak !
Uncertainty invests with tenfold dread
The utmost terrors of the startled mind.

Hugo. Lady, all men are mortal and death sits
With little triumph on the head, which age—
Hath consecrated with a life-time's honor..

Venetia, (*sinking into a chair.*)

Alas, my father's dead !

Francesca, (supporting her and looking at Hugo.)

Can this be true ?

Yes, yes, there's confirmation in his face !

My lord, my lord, thou should'st have couch'd thy
words

In darker meaning, till her frighten'd mind
Was roused to meet this dread calamity.

Venetia, (recovering.)

It is a jest,—a cruel, heartless jest !

If it were true, *thou* wouldst not bring these news,
But he whose love would soothe away my sorrow :
No one could forestall Cludio in his love.

Hugo. Lady, alas—Cludio—

Venetia. He is not dead !

Oh, if thou wouldst not see me lie a corpse
Or breaking into madness, spare me this.

Hugo. I left him even now in health, but oh—

Venetia. Why so then all is well, and all this tale

Was but a silly jest to frighten us.

Fie, fie, my lord : 'tis but a sorry sport
To trifle with a feeble woman's love.

Hugo. I would it were a jest ; but my own eyes
Bore weeping witness to the dreadful sight :
It is a bloody murder.

Venetia. Murder ! who ?

Thou canst not mean my father, for he might
Challenge the world to find a cause for hate
And triumph in no answer to his challenge.

Thou keepest me in torture ! where is Cludio ?

Hugo, (*sorrowfully.*)

Lord Cladio is in bonds.

Venetia, (*fiercely.*)

In bonds ? In bonds ?

Who dares to chain a free Venetian noble ?

In bonds ! For what ? Thou tell'st me first, my lord,
My father's dead, and now this monstrous tale,

That he, whose name reddens the city's cheek
With mantling pride, gives his free limbs to chains !
In bonds, for what ?

Hugo. Charg'd with the murder of

Venetia, (*laughing hysterically.*)

So now the mock'ry's ended : 'tis complete !
My Cludio charg'd with murder : oh, 'tis rare.
Confess, my lord, that all this is a jest.

Hugo. Alas, 'tis true,—all true.

Venetia. Thou tell'st me this !

Thou who wert wont to call my Cludio friend,
Didst thou stand by and see him led to prison
And didst not lift thy hand in his defence ?
Oh friendship, what a mockery art thou !

Hugo. What should I do ?

Venetia. Fie, fie ; what should'st thou do ?

Summon thy vassals,—raise thy spotless banner,—
Cry ‘Corelli to the rescue’—and set on.
If thou hadst lov’d thy friend thou hadst not ask’d.

Hugo. Defy Saint Mark ! why this is utter madness.
Besides, e’en if I wish’d, the proofs of guilt—
Venetia. The proofs are what ? *Thou* dost not think
him guilty.

My lord, thou dar’st not ! Call thyself his friend
And doubt his faith ! Hugo, I am at best
But a frail woman : but were I a man
Who had a friend and such a friend as he,—
Did an archangel come down from the skies,
Radiant with glory, hand in hand with truth,
And call’d him murd’rer,—I should think, my lord,
A demon had usurp’d the heav’nly form
And would have answer’d—“liar !”

Francesca. Patience, sweet cousin !

Thou wrong’st lord Hugo : on my life, thou dost.

Venetia. Wert thou in Cludio's place and he in thine
And any man had doubted Hugo's fame,
Cludio had found no answer save his sword
To write the slander on the liar's crest.
Oh, my good lord, I should as soon have thought
Dishonor could attack thy spotless name,
As that thou couldst have credited this tale.
Who will be true to him, when thou art false?

(*She weeps.*)

Hugo. No, lady, no : not *false* : that is a word
Which never yet has stained Corelli's name :
Did I but think—

Venetia. Oh, Sir: I cry you mercy!
We, who are lowly born, are wont to think
That constancy fits well a noble nature :
We know not thy patrician etiquette ;
And it may hap that ye do think it right
To turn against your friends, when others do.

Hugo. By heav'n, you do me wrong ! I'd love him yet

As ever I did love, ere this foul charge
Came like a plague to palsy and to kill
His fair nobility; oh, I would give
The proudest honors of the name I boast,
If I could dare the whole assembled world
To prove his guilt, and triumph in the thought
It was impossible.

Venetia. I say thou canst !

Hast thou so little faith ?—

(*A noise of weeping, &c., heard within.*)

Ah me—those sounds !

My father, my dear father !

(*She sobs.*)

Oh, my lord,

Have pity on a woman, craz'd with grief,

And help her in this dread extremity.

(*She kneels to HUGO.*)

My father lies a corpse and Cludio charg'd—

Oh heaven, grant me strength !

Hugo, (raising her.)

Rise, lady, rise!

Whatever I can do to save my friend—

Venetia. Friend! Hear, Francesca; he doth call him
friend.

Oh bless thee for that word: I knew, I knew
Thy noble nature would assert its own.

(Enter ANTONIO, hurriedly and weeping.)

Antonio. Oh, my sweet lady, they have brought—

Venetia. Oh, heav'n!

(She weeps bitterly.)

Baek, foolish tears! I have no time for tears:
Why weep for him, who in his maker's care
Reaps the blest harvest of a guileless life?
Go, bid the household cease its lamentation.

(To ANTONIO.)

It is not decent that a good man's bier
Should thus be plagued. Come, cousin, let us go;

The dead awaits our care.

(*Going.*)

Thou wilt not fail ?

(*To HUGO.*)

Hugo. If heav'n lend its aid, I will not, lady!

Venetia. God, in his mercy, help thee in thy work.

(*Exeunt VENETIA and FRANCESCA.*)

Hugo. Such is the love of woman ! In her heart

She sets the object of her worship up,

As men do place an Idol in a shrine !

On its sweet altar doth she sacrifice

All selfishness and ev'ry baser thought ;

And be the image hideous as the shapes

Of swarthy India's faith, to her it seems

The symbol of all beautiful and good.

With what a fine contempt and noble scorn

She forc'd me back to my allegiance !

Her very form dilated with the strength

With which she urged her lover's innocence.

By heav'n, it surely cannot be that one
Whose soul is grae'd with such a woman's love,
Could e'er be guilty of so base a crime.
I'll not believe it, and I hold it wrong
That I did e'er mistrust his noble nature.
He must be sav'd! But how?

(*He pauses in meditation.*)

Come hither, boy!
Dost love thy lady?

Antonio. Truly yes, my lord.

Hugo. And the lord Cludio? Dry thine idle tears:
Thy master needs them not; and if he did,
Thou couldst not save him by an age of weeping!
It is the living who do claim our care.
Thou lov'st thy mistress and lord Cladio is—
In peril of his life: if he should die
Thy lady would attend him e'en in death
As she would ne'er forsake him in this life.

Antonio. I will do all I can, my lord, to save him !

Hugo. Why, well said, boy ! First, hasten with all speed

To old lord Dandolo—thou know'st him well—

Then to Peseara and to Contarini.

They have avow'd themselves to me long since

Friendly to Cladio : tell them, by their leave

I fain would see them ere the senate meets.

To him of Arpa,—no, no, not to him :

Thou must say nought to him, but on his steps

Hang like a sleuth-hound, watch him ev'ry where:

Attend him as his shadow: let thy ears

Catch up each word that 'scapes his careless lip :

He loves not our Cladio, and 'twere well

To set a guard 'gainst his hostility.

Away, away ! There's death in ev'ry moment.

(ANTONIO *going.*)

Stay ! As thou go'st along observe the people

And listen to their converse on this matter :

Now go, and God be with thee!

(*Exit ANTONIO.*)

As for me,

Tho' ev'ry lip in Venice curl with scorn,

I shall redeem my word! See, here she comes

In all the awful majesty of woe.

(*He retires up the stage.*)

(*Enter VENETIA hurriedly.*)

Venetia. Have I forgotten all a daughter's love,

That even while I gaz'd upon his form

And saw that fearful wound, my tears turn'd back

And ev'ry thought was Clodio's? While I view'd

The tranquil horror of the face I lov'd,

The dreadful thought rose shud'ring thro' my soul—

E'en so will *Clodio* look: the eyes, which beam'd

With love's own fires to meet the glance thine gave,

Will thus grow dull in death:—the lips, which

smil'd

With heav'n's own affection, shall be stone

And smile on thee no longer:—the sweet voice,
Which turn'd thy soul to rapture, shall be mute,
E'en tho' thou call it with a thousand kisses.

I shall go mad if I but think on half
Of what my fears suggest! Oh, gracious heav'n,
Grant me the strength to think, to plan, to act;—
Raise me up friends in this extremity:—

Soften the hearts of those who judge his fate
And let thy mercy, heav'nly father, fall
Upon their souls! Let me but save *his* life,
And I shall be content with any fate!

END OF ACT II.

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*The Senate Chamber of Venice.* DANDOLO,
PESCARA, LORENZO.

Lorenzo. I do assure you, I was thunderstruck
And did deny it:—for of all the lords,
Who grace the head of Venice, I did think
He was the noblest.

Dandolo. Marry, so did I.

Lorenzo. And, when they told it me, I struck the
knaves,
Who, as I thought, did thus malign the fame
Of a brave soldier.

Dandolo. A brave soldier, true!

Pescara. 'Tis said Giovanni made his will and gave
That very morning, all his wealth to Cladio.

Lorenzo. Aye, there's the damning fact! This heavier
weighs

Than all the rest. He may have lost his dagger,
But here's a motive!

Dandolo. Yes, here's a motive.

Lorenzo, (*aside to Pescara.*)

Echo doth lodge within this dotard's throat. (*aloud.*)
But e'en without the motive there is proof
Enough to damn a man; the more the pity.

Dandolo (*sighing.*)

Aye, the more the pity.

Pescara. I always thought

There was a savage scowl upon his face
Which augur'd murder! What said lord Hugo
Of this grave accusation 'gainst his friend?

Lorenzo. He scarcely would believe in Cladio's guilt.—
They were too friendly for lord Hugo's fame:
Shrewd men will hardly think that Hugo knew
Nought of the murd'rous plan. They were too
friendly!

Dandolo. Aye, so think I!

Pescara. He sent his man to me
To meet him early.

Dandolo. So he did to me!

Lorenzo. So did he *not* to me: he loves me not.

Pescara. I did not grant his bidding.

Dandolo. Nor did I.

(Enter HUGO unseen from behind.)

Lorenzo. He wish'd, my lords, to sound ye and to use
His wondrous power in his friend's behalf.

Pescara. I ne'er could see what Hugo found in him
To love him thus!

Dandolo. Nor, in good sooth, could I.

Lorenzo. He was at all times but a surly churl.

Pescara. I never cou'd abide him!

Dandolo. Nor could I.

Hugo (advancing.)

He had at least, my lords, one quality
Which ye knew not: 'twas this:—he ever scorn'd
To utter that in secret which his sword
Dar'd not maintain at ev'ry time and place.

Ye three could ne'er abide him? That is true:
Whene'er, my lords, ye call'd him to the field
Ye never could abide him! 'Tis not new
This rare discovery that ye have made:
Ye three could ne'er abide him! Neither can
The loathsome fogs, which taint the presence of
The earth, abide the rising of the sun.

Dandolo. 'Tis very true.

Hugo. He was a gentleman!
The proudest title man can give to man.
To those of higher state, his conduct was
Respectful, firm and proud! To those who own'd

The privilege to call him friend, he was
Devoted, kind and true ! To other men
Inferior in station he did act
As tho' his birth was merely accident
And honor made all equal: and to women
He held a high-ton'd courtesy of thought
Which made him prompt to interpose his sword
To shield from insult all the sex alike,
The duchess or the poorest tradesman's daughter.
Gentle to all, subservient to none !
As brave as Mars, yet still as sensitive
Never to wound the feelings of another:
As kind, as true, as loyal and as bold
As any he, who ever trod the earth.
No time-worn dotard, signor Dandolo !
No ruffling gamester, worthy lord Lorenzo !
No scandal-monger, marquis of Pescara !
He was a gentleman ! D'ye take me sirs ?

(He lays his hand significantly on his sword.)

Lorenzo, (sneeringly.)

And yet this worthy *gentleman*, thy friend,
Did not conceive it 'neath his dignity
To murder foully a poor, weak old man.

Ha, ha! Here is a puzzle, good my lords.

Hugo (*impetuously*.)

Thou liest in thy teeth; as black a lie
As ever came from hell! Nay, by Saint Mark,
My sword shall cram the falsehood down thy throat.

(*They both draw and then a flourish of trumpets.*)

Dandolo. Peace, peace! Here comes the Doge: it
will not pass
To be thus brawling in the senate-chamber.
For God's sake, gentlemen, put up your swords;—
Here comes the Doge!

Lorenzo, (*sheathing his sword.*)

I'll bide my time, my lord!

Hugo, (*sheathing.*)

'Twill not come sooner than I wish it, Sir!

Dandolo. For heav'n's sake, peace!

(Enter DOGE and SENATORS, attended.)

God save your noble highness.

(*The DOGE ascends the throne—the lords arrange themselves around.*

Doge. We thank thec, good Dandolo, for thy wishes:—

In truth, the times are such, thy pious pray'r

Is not amiss. Good morrow, to your lordships!

Ah, noble Hugo, on thy brow, we read

The melancholy tidings of the night.

Our trusty Frangipani told us, Sirs,

That old Giovanni, whom the State held high

In its esteem for many favors render'd,

E'en while returning from our ducal palace

Hath been most foully murder'd: more he said

Of such a dark and most unnat'ral hue

That I did judge it best, most noble lords,

To hear no more until the senate met:—

For, circumstance points darkly unto one

For whose bright honor we'd have gag'd our own:
His name as high as any Veniee boasts:—
The State's best soldier,—noble Cludio!

Hugo. I do implore your grace to let no word
Of idle rumor prejudice my friend
In your opinion.

Doge. It shall not, my lord:
Be sure we shall hear all the evidence
And judge with justice: nor shall we, indeed,
Be mindless of the services thy friend
Hath render'd Venice. But these constant murders
Have dyed with shame the fair face of our city:
And be the bravo noble as ourself,
Nay, were he my own son, who foully took
This unoffending old man's life, be sure
He answers for it to th' offended law.

Lorenzo. I do beseech your grace to take in view
The well known virtues of lord Cludio,

Which in time past have ever shone abroad,
As the bright light which men do set on high
To guide the wand'rer safe.

Hugo, (aside.)

Oh, hypocrite!

Doge. We shall not be unmindful of this, too!

The love we bear to Cludio, ourself,
Doth well dispose us to heed ev'rything
Which can in any measure favor him.
Bring in the prisoner.

(Enter CLODIO, with FRNGIPANI and GUARDS.)

Cludio Renaldi,
Of a most dreadful crime thou art arraign'd;—
In this, that thou with rash and vi'lent hand
Didst tear away an old man's failing breath;
One, who did not offend thee and whose life
Was dear unto the State: how sayst thou, Sir?
Art guilty of this crime or innocent?

Cludio. Most innocent yet most unfortunate,
Great duke, in this that ev'ry current fact
Goes far to prove me guilty.

Doge. Thus it is
That we have hear'd : yet do not doubt this thing—
Thy trial shall be fair and not prejudg'd.
We fain would think thee guiltless of this act,
Both for the love we ever felt for thee
And for the service thou hast done the State,
Which, like a jewel in a monarch's crown,
Shines brightly in the chaplet Venice weaves
Of her sons' noble deeds in chivalry ;
A diadem more rich than ever yet
Adorn'd the brow of scepter'd royalty.
No more of that : we come to judge, not praise.
Good Frangipani, speak thy evidence.

Alberto. So please your noble grace, while yester eve
I took my 'custom'd round upon the quay—

Hard by the palace found I old Giovanni,
Still warm, but dead,—this dagger in his heart.

(*He gives the dagger to the Doge.*)

I was so stunn'd to see this cruel deed
'Gainst one so unoffending unto all,
I stood aghast,—'till, rallying my strength,
I shouted the alarm and gave command
To close up all the ways and let none pass.
Hard by the spot we found lord Cludio,
And all his clothes and hands were stain'd with blood:
Within his bosom lurk'd this jewell'd sheath

(*He gives the sheath to the Doge.*)

Fitting the fatal dagger just and true:
Yourself, my lord, may see upon the hilt
Renaldi's arms and cypher !

Doge, (looking at the dagger.)

Aye, 'tis so !

What said the prisoner ?

Allerto. He stood aghast,

And seem'd confounded in his guilt, my lord ;
I question'd him, but he no answer made
Save wild and incoherent exclamations.

Lorenzo. Oh, this is horrible !

Alberto. We also found,
Most noble Doge, this parchment on his person.

(*He gives the DOGE the parchment.*)

Doge, (*examining it.*)
It is the old man's will and this foul deed
Arose from this. It is most horrible !
Cludio Renaldi, what hast thou to say ?

Cludio. Nothing that I could say, most noble Doge,
Could now avail to intermit the doom
Impending o'er me :—yet I deem it right,
Not craven-like to bow me to despair,
But manfully and with a constant soul
To bend all efforts to preserve my life :
Not that I tremble at the view of death,

Whom—(think not that I boast)—I've often met
Upon the field of war, and hurl'd him back
Upon the serried columns of the foe:
But that the honor of my house and name,
(Which ye do threaten in my cause of death)
Demands my argument: and that one Being—
But, by your leave, we will not speak of that,
Lest that my swelling heart perchance may feign
The fear I feel not! Now, as to this charge,
It is most false! Yet ev'ry word, my lords,
That Frangipani here hath spoke is true.
The dagger to Giovanni I did lend,
With what intent it boots not now to say.
On yester-even as I walk'd along
I saw the glitter of a jewell'd sheath,
Spark'ling upon the dusky brow of night
And seized the tempting prize:—close to my heart
I held the deadly snare which fortune sent
And thank'd the treach'rous jade: then follow'd all

As ye have hear'd! This is the truth, my lords.
As to Giovanni, could my heart's best blood
Restore him back to life, there is a cause
Would make each drop, which lingers near its core,
Leap madly to be free!

Lorenzo. This may be true:—

But then—the will!

Doge. We fain would think it true,
Yet cannot so believe it: hast thou then
No other proof, except this bare assertion?

Clodio. None, gracious Doge; save this, that in time
past

Truth and myself have ever been at peace!

Lorenzo. I do beseech your highness not to pass
Judgment in haste, else—

Hugo. Peace, dissembler, peace!

I love not this lip-service, which doth kill

With poison'd honey. 'Tis in vain, my lords,
To blazen Cladio's deeds in his behalf,
Else could I make so noble a defence
Merely with acts that I myself have seen
Cladio achieve within the lists of war,
That e'en the marble statues of your hall
Would burst into applause. But 'tis in vain !
Tho' he could boast the virtues of Saint Mark
Ye would not 'bate his doom. One way remains,
Sanction'd, my lords, by holy church herself !
If it doth please your grace, by virtue of
Time honor'd custom to ordain in this
Ordeal by battle,—lo, here stand I,
Hugo Corelli, a good knight and true,
Ready with lance, with battle-axe or sword,
To make my quarrel good, and prove the lie
On him who questions Cladio's innocence.
There lies my gage and God defend the right.

(He throws down his gauntlet.)

Cludio. Thanks, Hugo, thanks for this! My heart leaps up

Once more at thy devotion: but, my friend,
If it doth please his grace to grant us this,
No one but Cludio must prove Cludio's honor.

Lorenzo, (*advancing towards the glove.*)

I pray, your grace, let me take up the glove.

Doge. It cannot be; we doubt not, lord Lorenzo,
Thy ardor in the service of the state:
But in this matter we forbid the trial.
Captain Alberto, take thou up the glove
And keep it in the name of good Saint Mark.

Hugo. Then all is lost!

(Enter an attendant.)

Attendant. May 't please your gracious highness,
A lady waits without, beseeching entrance:
She boasts she knows who took Giovanni's life
And wishes to bear witness on this point.

Doge. What is her name?

Attendant. I know not, good my liege,
Nor would she say, when ask'd; but with a **wild**
And hasty importunity she press'd
Instant admission!

Doge. This is very strange.

Lorenzo, (disturbed.)

Trust it not, my lord.

Doge. Give her admission.

(*Exit attendant, and then enter VENETIA in deep mourning: she casts off her veil, looks hurriedly around and springs into CLODIO's arms.*)

Venetia. Oh, Cludio, Cludio, hath it come to this?

Cludio, (embracing her.)

Heaven, I thank thee, for this boon at least!

My own Venetia, thou hast shed a light

Along my darken'd path: I thought, my love,

That thou too, like the rest, would'st deem me guilty.

Venetia, (reproachfully.)

I think thee guilty! Shame to thee, Cludio!

Cludio. Nay, pardon me the thought: I did thee
wrong

To class thee with a base and heartless world:

But in the fatal chance—

Venetia. Hush, Cludio, hush!

I conjure thee by the sweet love thou bear'st me
Speak not of that.

Lorenzo. 'Tis old Giovanni's daughter.

Doge. Why, look ye, how she hangs upon his breast,
As tho' she found a comfort in the sourcee
Whence sprang her misery! This is not well.
Maiden, why dost thou thus caress the man
Thou hast most cause to hate?

Venetia. Most cause to hate?

Ah me, I had forgot;—this frightful charge:

Would'st know, my lord, why I thus turn to him?

Why does the ship-wreck'd wretch, who struggles
'midst

The angry breakers, grasp a shatter'd spar
And cling to it with such a frantic hold
That even death itself cannot dissolve it?

Doge. It is a foolish question: he who drowns
Grasps at aught near him.

Venetia. Aye, and so do I!
Struggling amid misfortune's angry waves—
A drowning wretch—I stretch my eager hand
To grasp at safety. Ye would tear it from me.

Doge. But this man—

Venetia. Is my betroth'd, my lord!
Was to have been my husband ere to-morrow:
And tho' my lips no vows have breath'd on earth,
One from my heart is register'd in heav'n,

Which I'll be sure to keep—aye, sure to keep.

Dandolo. Thou would'st not wed with him who slew
thy father?

Venetia. Thou gray-headed slanderer, 'tis a lie!
Shame to thee, old man! My Cladio murder?
Ye think not thus, my lords: deem ye that I
Who lov'd my father with a love that came
Near to idolatry could brook the sight
Of him who slew him? There is no guilt here!

(*She embraces Cludio.*)

Doge. We would it were so, lady, but the proof
Bears home conviction.

Venetia. Proof! what is this proof?
Cladio, they'd murder thee and call it justice.
My lords, my lords, some demon hath raised up
False circumstance to steal away your minds
And lead ye to destruction: oh, beware!
'Tis peril to your souls to slay a man
Guiltless of crime.

Doge. Alas, we pity thee.

Venetia. Then spare him for that pity, noble Doge:

Check not the blessed current which doth flow

From mercy's threshold, and an orphan's pray'rs

Shall weary heaven for thy happiness.

Oh, thou wilt grant my pray'r; I know thou wilt!

Doge. It cannot be. Justice must take its course.

Venetia, (wildly.)

Is there no hope? Will no one plead for me?

Has heav'n no means to shield the innocent?

Ah, see! my father's shrouded form appears

Crown'd with the awful majesty of death:

(*She gazes and points on vacancy.*)

The dead hath come among ye here, my lords,

To bear high witness to his innocence.

Lorenzo, (starting up anxiously.)

Saint Mark protect me! Where?

Venetia, (advancing and still pointing.)

Why, there it goes:
See'st thou it not? 'Tis gone.

(*A pause.*)

Doge. Alas, poor maid;
Her mind's distraught with grief!

Venetia. No, no, not so!

My mind is not distraught, most noble Doge.
Think ye, my lords, it is a thing so strange
That e'en the sheeted dead should burst asunder
Their silent habitations and come forth
In haste to interpose their awful forms
Between ye and the dread impiety
Ye contemplate to practice? Such a deed
Will bring down heaven's vengeance upon Venice!
Your marble palaces shall be the haunts
Of owls and bats and other hideous things
Which gloat upon decay: your tow'ring walls
Shall crumble into dust: and Venice self,
Tho' haughty in her pow'r, she mocks at crime,

Shall be the by-word of her sister nations.

Oh, such a crime as ye do contemplate

Shall not go unaveng'd of heav'n, my lords.

Doge. Enough of this! We have borne much with
thee

Thro' pity of thy sorrow, and the love

We owe thy father's memory: but now

Thy speech doth pass all bounds of due respect.

But for the service that thy honor'd sire—

Venetia, (with great excitement.)

Ah, speak you now of service? Show me him

Who can contend with Cludio in the debt

Of gratitude that Venice owes her sons.

E'en you, yourself, my lord, hast thou forgot

How when the infidels did hem *thee* round

And ev'ry sword was thirsting for thy blood,—

Whose arm came sweeping to the rescue then?

Whose battle-cry did nerve thy heart with hope?

Who snatch'd thee from a thousand angry foes

And sent thee back to life?

Doge. 'Twas Cludio!

Venetia, (triumphantly.)

Aye, 'twas my Cludio! 'Twas his own brave heart
That rescued Venice: think you, good my lord,
The soul that did that deed could ever stoop
To secret murder? 'Tis impossible.

Dodge, (much moved.)

Alas, I would have thought so: I would give
Half of my life if I could save him now.
But, were he my own son, I could not help him.

Venetia. Thou canst not while thy memory is fresh,
How he did peril life to save thine own,
Condemn him now. Oh, give a little time:
A month—a week—a day: something may hap
To prove his innocence. I have great wealth,
And Venice I am told hath need of it:
What is one life to Venice? Take it all
And let him live, e'en tho' it be but for
Another day!

Doge. Venice sells not her justice.

Cludio Renaldi, listen to our sentence.

Cludio. Take her hence, Hugo! take her quickly
hence.

She will go mad or die, if she hears this;
Oh, take her hence!

Venetia. No, no, I will not go;
Sweet Cludio, let me stay: I wish to hear
What noble bounty Venice gives her sons
Who have risk'd life and all in her defence.
Indeed I shall not stir nor say one word,
Nay, not a single one. Speak on, my lord.

Doge. Our sentence is, that for this heinous crime
We give thee to the wheel: to-morrow morn
At sun-rise thou must die, and may thy God
Grant to thy sinful spirit that sweet mercy
Which human justice may not here bestow.

Venetia, (tottering forwards.)

Oh, no, no ! Not *to-morrow* morn, great Duke !

Oh mercy, mercy, he is innocent :

Most innocent, my lords,—oh mercy, mercy !

(*She falls insensible on the steps of the throne, LORENZO advances to raise her.*)

Hugo, (springing forwards.)

Back, back ; touch her with thy licentious hand
And tho' thou stood'st before a thousand Dukes,
By heav'n, thou 'dst answer for it with thy life—
Aye, tho' my own should be the penalty.

(*He raises her, and exeunt DOGE, DANDOLO, PESCARA and attendants.*)

Lorenzo (to Hugo.)

A day of reckoning will come, my lord.

Hugo. Whene'er thou wilt : now leave me, mountebank.

(*Exit LORENZO : HUGO places VENETIA in CLODIO's arms who regards her sadly.*)

Clodio. Farewell, farewell ! She feels no sorrow now.

Oh, Hugo, better she should never wake

Than wake to feel the bitterness of grief
That must be hers : why was I ever born
To bring down sorrow on so fair a head ?
Farewell, sweet angel ! 'Tis not death which fills
My soul with terror, but it is the pang
Of being torn from thee. See, she revives :
Oh Hugo, in the night which closes round
Her spirit's light, be thou the guide to tend
Her wand'ring footsteps, and be sure of this :—
If gentle Heav'n grant the loving soul
To linger near the forms most dear on earth,
I will be by thee, watching o'er her welfare.
I must not stay till she returns to sense ;
One kiss !

(*Kisses her with great emotion and gives her back to*

HUGO.)

And now, indeed, farewell for ever.

(*Exeunt CLODIO and FRANGIPANI.*)

Hugo. I'll see thee yet again ! Ah, she revives.

God help her in her anguish.

Venetia. (Recovering.)

Innocent,—

He's innocent, my lords, condemn him not.

Ha, gone? all gone?—and Cladio doom'd to death?

Oh, what a wretch was I to swoon away

When Cladio's life was trembling in the scale!

The wheel, the wheel!—Hugo, is there no hope?

Hugo. I did all man could do: alas, in vain.

Venetia. But more must still be done! Away, away!

Each moment, as it flies, grows dark with death:

I tell thee Hugo, that a thousand years

Are center'd in each minute: I must away.

Hugo. But whither would'st thou go?

Venetia. Unto the Doge!

What argument to use, I know not yet:

Perhaps nought else but beg and pray and weep:—

Do anything but loiter idly here

And fret myself to madness ! Let us go :
Heaven will give me strength.

(*Exit VENETIA followed by HUGO.*)

END OF ACT III.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*A Dungeon.*—CLODIO and a FRIAR.

Clodio. The worst is past: the dreadful agony
Of hope awaken'd, lost, sustain'd again:
For then my soul was tortur'd with the doubt
Of what might be, while now the certain future
Stands out in bold relief, and my nerv'd heart
Is strong to meet my doom! Speak'st thou of justice?
What is my sin that I am doom'd to writhe,
Tortured before the foul and hooting mob,—
My free-born limbs the undisputed spoil
Of the detested executioner?
It may be pow'r, but do not speak of justice.

Friar. My son, my son, I grieve to see thy mind
Revolting thus 'gainst Heaven's high decree.
Misfortune is our birth-right and 'tis well—
For 'tis indeed the med'cine of the soul:

Man's life is but a trial and his ills
Are the most potent acids which may test
The golden pureness of his deathless soul.

Cludio. It is a soothing doctrine, but my mind
Is not prepar'd, good father, to receive it.
My sense of wrong—my honor'd name debas'd—
My life's whole labor, melted in a breath—
The fairest future ever dawn'd on man—
All gone, all blasted—wither'd in an hour.

(Enter VENETIA hurriedly.)

Thou here, Venetia! Good father, leave us.

Friar. Peace be with thee, son.

(Exit FRIAR.)

Cludio. (*Embracing her.*)

Oh, my Venetia,
Thou shinest in the darkness of this cell
Like a bright meteor in a stormy sky,
Which flashes o'er the troubled ocean's breast

And leaves the frighten'd mariner to grope
His way thro' thicker darkness when 'tis gone.

Venetia. Is there no ear to pry into our counsel?—
No lurking spy? Cludio, are we alone?

Cludio. Aye, all alone; except with Misery,
Who will not leave me, love, until I stand
Before the gate of heav'n, if heav'n can be
Where thou art not.

Venetia. Then up and let us go.
I have without a gondola as swift
As eagles' wings, mann'd by a crew as brave
As Venice boasts:—Hugo did furnish these.—
Thy jailor, old Gonsalvo, whom thou know'st
Thy father's trusty servant, opens wide
These dreary portals: quick, don this disguise
And let us fly.

(*She takes a Boatman's dress from under her mantle.*)

Cludio. Fly? Aye, and to what purpose?

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To be pursued, ta'en like a skulking knave,
And hurried back to death? If thou hadst known
What guard the winged lions keep o'er Venice
Thou hadst not hatch'd this scheme. I will not go!

Venetia, (eagerly.)

We shall not be pursued,—we shall escape!
The Doge hath said,—“I cannot pardon him;
But if he 'scape there shall be no pursuit
Until such time as he shall well have reach'd
The bound'ries of the state.”

Cludio. Ha! said he that?

Quick, give me the disguise!

(He seizes the disguise.)

Venetia. He's sav'd, he's sav'd!

Hasten, sweet Cludio: by to-morrow's morn,
The sun, which was to look upon thy death,
Will see us far away upon the waves.
In that sweet villa, by the Arno's banks,
Where first thy love was whisper'd, will we live:

Blest in each other's love and looking back
Upon the mad distraction of these times.
As but a foil to make us happier still.
Come, come ! why dost thou stay ?

Cludio. And men will say,
Speaking of this in the far time to come—
'Venice knew nothing nobler than this house,
Until one Cludio, doom'd to unjust death,
Did prove himself a coward,—basely fled,—
Leaving his name the scorn of ev'ry tongue,
And blacken'd all his race with infamy !—
I will not go; I cannot go, Venetia !
Forth from the glorious past, a thousand forms
Of my dead fathers rise and wave me back
From this foul outrage on their noble names.

(*He throws down the disguise.*)

Venetia. Thou wilt not go? Distraction ! 'Tis a fiend,
Not Cludio, who doth thus assail my hearing.

Thou canst not mean it! Know'st thou not 'tis
death—

'Tis death, thy resolution ushers in?

Cludio. Aye, death, Venetia! Wherefore speak it
thus,

With such a terror in thy quiv'ring voice?

'Tis not so terrible; it seems to me

'Tis not the grisly monster that they paint:

But rather 'tis a matron meek and mild,

Who stretches forth her shelt'ring arms for us

And bears us in her bosom safe and hush'd

E'en as a mother bears a weary child.

Venetia. Yes, yes;—but then this death upon the
wheel;

To see thy quiv'ring limbs, thy writhing form,

The foam upon thy lips all fleck'd with blood:

To see thee as my father was last night,

All red with gore,—oh, horror, horror, horror!!!

(*She hides her eyes—a pause.*)

Clodio, thou'l go with me—I know thou wilt.
Oh, I did strive so hardly for thy life,
And 'twas but now my hopes did soar so high,—
It would be cruel beyond all expression
If thou wilt not; nay, do not shake thy head
With such a sigh: I tell thee thou *must* go!—
Grant me thy pardon if my words exceed
The bounds of maiden modesty, for I
Am frantic—mad! What is this dainty honor
Thou dost speak of? Does it forbid the man,
Unjustly charg'd, to save his judges from
A dreadful crime? To save thyself and me
From death and madness by a little time
Snatch'd from oblivion?

Clodio. My poor Venetia,
Thou mak'st excuses, not an argument.
Honor! 'Tis boundless as the universe,
And yet it may be held in little compass:
'Tis mighty as the ocean in a storm,

And yet so weak, a child may overthrow it :
'Tis brilliant as the sun with all his beams,
And yet the slightest breath will tarnish it
Beyond redemption ; 'tis a paradox :
Stern and yet gentle,—constant and yet fickle ;
No, no, Venetia : importune no more ;
Tho' I possess'd a boundless sea of honor,
A drop of it were worth a thousand lives.

Venetia, (coldy.)

And so thy mind is fix'd ? Thou wilt not go ?

Cludio. Not on such terms. In such a case as this
I have no choice : the path of honor is
To cleave unto our house's purity :
That stainless it may not record I fled,
A coward, from the judgment of my country.
I have no fear of death : the innocence,
Conscious within me, doth oppose a mail
Impenetrable 'gainst all suffering.
'Tis but the guilty wretch would seek by flight

To save his life,—a wretched fugitive.

No, I must die !

Venetia, (resolutely.)

Then I will die with thee.

Be sure, the sun which rises on thy death

Shall herald me to heav'n.

Clodio, (aghast.)

Why, thou art mad !

Venetia. Yes, yes, I am—too true, I am : but still

There's purpose in my madness, Clodio.

Death bears no terrors ;—think on thy own words !

“ ‘Tis not the grisly monster that they paint :

But rather ‘tis a matron meek and mild,

Who stretches forth her shelt’ring arms for us,

And bears us in her bosom, safe and hush’d,

E’en as a mother bears a weary child !”

‘Tis my own thought.

Clodio. This is not well, Venetia.

Venetia. Dost thou remember, once thou told'st me of
That noble Roman dame, who, when her lord
Was doom'd to death, yet was allow'd to choose
The manner of his death, did snatch the knife
From his reluctant hand and drove it home
To her own heart: then gave it back and said—
“Sweet love, there is no pain,”—and, smiling, died.
Thou then didst say that all th' angelic host,
With waving pinions and triumphant songs,
Must have come forth to welcome her to heav'n.
So shall they me.

Clodio. Nay, nay, not so, Venetia!
It was a *heathen* dame who did that deed:
She answer'd nobly to her sense of right:
But thou hast other guides:—look to thy faith,
That precious balm to sooth misfortune's wounds.
Religion is a heav'nly gem, which shines
With purer lustre when 'tis placed within
The jetty setting of adversity!

Look thou to that and when I shall have gone
And the whole heav'n shall darken to thy sight
Thou'l find this star shine ever brighter from
The blackness of the sky.

Venetia. When thou art gone !

Clodio. If thou should'st die, Venetia, who is left
To rescue from its shame my memory ?
Thy portion will be solitude, 'tis true :
But thou wilt need no manly arm to shield thee.
Men will regard thee with a holy awe,
As one made sacred by her many griefs :
The poor will love thee with a tender love,
For thy kind heart will sooth away their sorrows :
Each soul bow'd down with grief will turn to thee,
For thou wilt weep with them and ev'ry tear
Shall consolation bring : until at length
Thou'l seem an angel sent down from the skies
To banish grief. Oh, from such lips as thine

My innocence asserted shall be thron'd
Upon the minds of all ; and, when the time
Of thy long trial reaches to its bourne,
Thou'l find me waiting to conduct thee hence
To happiness eternal.

Venetia. Oh, speak no further;
Thou must not die: I'll to the Doge once more.

(*Going.*)

Cludio, (*much affected and stretching his arms towards her.*)

My Venetia, we may not meet again !

Venetia, (*returning and embracing him passionately.*)
Oh, say not so : oh, Cludio, say not so,
Lest that thou fright'st me from my enterprize :
And yet it may be : so I will not go.

Cludio. Yes, go, Venetia, and heav'n crown thy pray'rs
With all success. Farewell, sweet love, farewell.

(*He leads her to the door, and exit VENETIA sobbing.*)

Clodio. And farewell too to hope ! I do remember
How when last year they took that caitiff spy
And bound him to the wheel, the writhing wretch
Did howl for mercy, supplianting death.

What if my courage fail beneath the pain
And I should groan : ah, there's a fearful thought !
Or, as the torture racks my stiff'ning limbs
And my blood oozes from the tighten'd thongs,
Should beg a little water for the sake
Of mercy, even from the loathsome hands
Of the abhorred executioner.

I do mistrust myself and I would die
A thousand deaths sooner than this should be :
Come then thou blessed refuge from distress.

(*Takes a phial from his bosom.*)

I little thought when first I did procure thee
To guard my honor, if perchance the Turk
Should take me captive, e'er to find in thee
My firmest friend in such a coil as this.

(*Enter FRIAR unseen from behind.*)

Come, thou benignant soother of my fears,—
Thou blessed angel, who doth stand betwixt
A felon's doom and me; come, gentle Death,
And waft me on thy dusky wings from earth.
Venice, I drink to thee!

(*He raises the phial to his lips.*)

Friar, (*rushing forwards and snatching the phial.*)

What wouldst thou do?

Cludio. Is fate then so unkind? I would have 'scap'd
The infamy of death.

Friar. Thou fear'st not that:

It is the dread of torture that appals thee.
If, in the stead of torment, thou'dst been doom'd
Unto a speedy end, thou hadst not thought
Of *infamy* in death. Why, know'st thou not
Only the coward seeks at times to die?

Cludio, (*angrily.*)

Dar'st thou say 't?

Friar. Aye, I dare to speak the truth.

Unthinking man, thou cry'st against the doom
Which Veniee gives thee to, and yet thou'dst go
With murder, fresh upon thy soul, to judgment.

Clodio. What murder dost thou speak of?

Friar. 'Tis thine own,
Which is the worst of murders in this fact:
The deed which makes the crime doth take away
All chance of due repentance. Who art thou
That with a sinful hand wouldest dare forestal
The awful will of God? I know thee brave:
Even thy foes will not gainsay thee that:
To-morrow thou wilt battle with a foe
More dread than all the panopli'd array
That war delights in; thy trial is at hand
And wilt thou at this moment quail before
The terror of his presence? Fear'st thou pain?
Quick,—don the armor of thy fortitude,
And die triumphant even o'er thyself.

Cludio. Thy words are like the trumpet note, which calls

The warrior to the battle, and my soul
Is up in arms to dare them to the worst.

Shrive me, good father,—shrive me of my sins.

(*He kneels before the Friar who stands over him in the attitude of benediction and the scene changes.*)

SCENE II.—*A room in the Ducal palace. Enter Doge and attendant.*

Doge. Thou sayst she craves admittance to our presence?

Attendant. Your highness, yes; and such entreaty made,

So eloquent of grief, as mov'd the hearts
Of all who hear'd her pray'r.

Doge. Alas, poor maid!

Give her admittance without more delay.

(*Exit attendant.*)

Doubtless she comes to tell us of his safety:

I trust it may be so : my heart doth shrink
From snapping short the life which sav'd mine own.

(Enter VENETIA.)

Well, has he fled ?

Venetia, (passionately.)

He will not go, my lord,

He will not go !

Doge. Thou'rt mad to tell me so ! .

Is he, then, sick of life that he would stay
To meet a felon's death ?

Venetia. I urg'd him thus :

I wearied him with pray'rs that he should fly :
Alas, 'twas tho' I spoke to soulless marble !

Doge. What answer did he give ?

Venetia. That life was sweet
When honor was the food by which it thrrove :
But, tho' he had a thousand lives to lose,
He would not cast them in the scale 'gainst honor.

Doge. 'Twas like his noble self ! Oh, Venice, Venice,
The fairest gem which glitters in thy crown
Is madly thrown away. I can no more :
The die is cast and were he my own son
I could not save him now.

Venetia. Oh, speak not thus :
Thou'rt potent, wise and good : thou know'st some
means
To help us from this strait: I know thou dost.
Oh, save him, mighty Duke ; oh save him, save
him !

(*She throws herself at his feet.*)

Doge. It is impossible !

Venetia. It cannot be !
Art thou not prince—and who will dare say ‘nay,’
If thou dost give assent unto his pardon ?
Oh, spare him gracious prince ! Let him but live
And he shall give his life up to the State,
Her bulwark and defense : his care for her

Shall never find a rival in my love.
I'll give up all for him: his ev'ry thought
Shall be for Venice only: let him but live
And I shall die content, the bride of Heav'n.

Doge, (raising her,)

Listen, Venetia; Cludio sav'd my life
And, would to God, I could requite the gift.
It cannot be: e'en tho' I grant the boon
Thou ask'st, the dreaded Council of the Ten,
Jealous long since of Cludio's rising fame,
Would make the pardon void: perchance *my* life
Would be the forfeit of my useless mercy.

Venetia. They cannot be so heartless: they are men
And owe their being to a woman's love.
Tell them but this—this poor distracted maid
But yester-morning was the happiest girl
The sun e'er shone upon: but in one day—
One little day—before a cloud arose
In her pure heav'n of joy to give her warning,

The bolt came down : she saw her father dead :
Her lover charg'd with murder and oh God !
The murderer of that father : she, herself,
A most unhappy, miserable wretch.
Tell them all this and if they but be men,
Why they will pardon him for mercy's sake.

Doge. Thou know'st them not, Venetia : they are such
As heed not women's tears or strong men's groans :
'Twere vain, indeed, to rest thy hopes on them.

Venetia, (clasping her hands.)

Where shall I turn, what can I say or do ?
Tho' it were true that Cladio slew my father,
It was *my* sire he slew and *I* forgive him ;
The loss was mine and I am satisfied.
Then wherefore do *ye* hunt him thus to death ?

Doge. A ruler is the father of his people,
Whose lives are sacred to him as his own .—

Venetia. It is not true ! A loving father truly

Art thou to me and Cludio. Father indeed !
Thou dost but mock my grief and time flies by
The short, short time that I can see him still.
I will away to him and we shall pray
A greater princee than thou, for that high justice
Which thou wilt not bestow.

Doge. Hear me, Venetia !

Venetia. Oh, speak to me no more, lest that my lips
Should break out into curses: ye're all alike !
Ye're all athirst to lap his guiltless blood
And heap up burning coals on my poor brain.
God will requite ye for all this; be sure
He hears the cry of tortur'd innocence
And will not let it pass.

Doge. Hear me, Venetia !

Venetia. I will *not* hear thee. Waste thy breath in
pray'r

To heav'n to mitigate the awful doom
Your crimes will bring upon this haughty city.
Ye're all alike and I have done with ye.

(*Going.*)

All, all alike: all hard, and stern and cruel.

(*Exit speaking.*)

END OF ACT IV.

ACT V.

SCENE I.—*A street in Venice. Venetia discovered reclining on a flight of steps. Her dress much disordered and her hair dishevelled. Time—early dawn.*

Venetia. There breaks the dawn at last,—the fearful

dawn,

The herald of the still more frightful sun.

Methinks an age hath pass'd since my poor head,

By anguish overwrought, sank down forlorn

Into forgetfulness, save that at times

Recall'd to dreamy life, methought I hear'd

Sweet voices murmuring from the still canal,—

“Come, here is rest, Venetia: come to us:

We'll spread a couch for thee beneath the wave

Where thou shalt be at peace!” I would have gone

But that I knew I could not see him there!

There is a heavy weight upon my brain,

(*She presses her hand to her head.*)

And I am cold and weary—oh, so weary!

(*Sighs.*)

Failing Nature balk'd me of my fix'd intent
Of seeing him last night. I'll hide myself
In some dark corner and, as he goes by,

(*Rises.*)

I'll run and cast my arms about his neck
And go with him to death! Aye, he may beg
A little water in his agony
To cool his burning lips. I'll bring it him:

(*The bell tolls, she shudders and speaks wildly.*)

Ha! are ye there? Are ye so keen of time?
There was a merry peal for holiday.

(*Enter Lorenzo.*)

Good Morrow to your Lordship! Dost thou go
To see the execution? Come with me!

(*She laughs wildly.*)

'Twill be a merry show, and we shall see 't;
Aye, that we shall. Come, come, thou must not
stay;

There'll be a crowd! Oh God, oh God, oh God!!!

(*She clasps her head in her hands.*)

Lorenzo, (aside.)

Can she be mad?

(*Aloud.*)

That is no place for thee,

Fair lady; I do pray thee, go with me.

Indeed, indeed, thou must not linger here!

Venetia. I must, I must.

Lorenzo. Why, thou shalt see such sights

As even cause the callous hearts of men

To shudder with affright. Thou must not stay!

Venetia. Wouldst separate the bridegroom and the
bride?

It is not well that thou shouldst urge me thus.

Wouldst have me leave him now, when all the world

Is leagued for his destruction? I will stay

Tho' my heart break in witnessing his pangs.

Lorenzo. If thou dost love him thus, thou yet may'st
save him.

Venetia, (sadly.)

It cannot be : hope cheats me now no more,
But with a pitying smile doth point me out
My future comrades in this world of woe,—
The patient sisters born of Grief and Faith,
Pale Resignation leading dumb Despair.

Lorenzo. Wouldst thou be willing to renounce his
hand

In case his life be saved ?

Venetia. Thou dost but mock me ;
Did I not offer this unto the Doge ?
Let him but live—but spare his precious life,—
And screen'd within the cloister's sacred shade,
Venetia dies content.

Lorenzo. One other thing :

Wouldst thou consent never to see him more ?

Venetia. If he should die, I'd never see him more;
Then why not promise this? Plague me no longer
With such questionings.

Lorenzo. I can save thy Cludio!

Venetia, (starting.)

Thou canst?

Lorenzo. Listen to me one instant longer.

If I should save this man, wilt promise me
To tear forth from thy heart each thought of love
That hovers o'er his form? To look on him
With the stern eye of cold indifference?
To force back to thy heart the joyful blood
Which, flashing from thy cheeks, would greet his
presence?

Wilt promise this?

Venetia. No! That I will not do!

Better that he and I and all should die
Than he should live to feel contempt for me

And I, to see and know 't. What thy intent
To torture me so cruelly may be,
Surpasses all surmise: but this is fix'd,—
Whatever woe heav'n still reserves for me,
I will not act a lie!

Lorenzo. It matters not.

Venetia, from the hour when first I saw thee,
Thron'd in my heart thy presence reign'd supreme
At once my hope and torment: o'er thy form
Fond mem'ry, brooding with incessant love,
Gave birth to thoughts, each dearer than the other.
Nay, turn not from me,—I will save thy lover—
For but one kind glance from those azure eyes.
Oh pity me, Venetia! let my love
Be some atonement for my bold request.
The hour appointed by my fate is come
And seems auspicious in its time and place
To plead my suit. Link but thy fate with mine
And Cludio shall be free!

(*The bell tolls.*)

Venetia, (recoiling.)

Away, away!

Dost thou not hear *my* joyful wedding bells?

A happy bridal would we have forsooth

When e'en the hymns which consecrate my vows

Would be his groans—*his* groans upon the wheel.

Lorenzo, (eagerly.)

I'll save his life: by heav'n's light, I will.

Venetia, (scornfully.)

Enough, enough! *Thou* seek to wed with *me*?

The vulture weds not with the eagle's mate,

Nor thou with Cludio's bride!

Lorenzo, (angrily.)

Why stand I here

Exchanging reasons with a peevish girl

And wasting honied words? Since thou wilt not,

With gentle, loving force, I'll rule thy fate

And hold myself in bondage to thy charms.

(Advancing towards her.)

Venetia, (retreating.)

Why, this is insolence! What mean thy words?

Lorenzo. Nay, never mind, fair mistress: thou art mine;

Call on thy Cludio now!

(*Seizes and attempts to carry her off.*)

Venetia. Unhand me, villain!

Help, help: Cludio! Where art thou, Cludio? Help?

Hugo (within.)

Who calls for help on him who most needs help?

(*Enter HUGO and from the opposite side DANDOLO, PESCARA and ANTONIO. HUGO advances hastily on LORENZO, drawing at the same time.*)

Insolent hound, this passes all endurance.

(*He seizes LORENZO by the throat and hurls him off.*)

Lorenzo, (advancing.)

Thou in my path again!

(*They fight.*)

Dandolo. My lords, my lords;

Beat down their swords, Pescara!

(*After a pass or two, LORENZO staggers back into PESCARA's arms.*)

Venetia to Hugo, (clasping her hands.)

What hast thou done?

Pescara, (to Lorenzo.)

I trust thou art not hurt?

Lorenzo, (faintly.)

Nay, that's past hope:

My time is up, Pescara.

Venetia, (to Hugo.)

Oh, my lord,

Send quickly for a priest: let him not die

With an unshrive[n] soul.

Lorenzo. Thy care is vain:

But bless thee, lady, for the kindly thought.

There is a weight of guilt upon my soul

That I would cast away. Hark ye, Pescara!

This ebbing tide hath borne away my sight:
Has the sun risen yet?

Pescara. He lingers still:

But all the east is flushing rosy red
To herald his approach.

Lorenzo, (*with sudden energy.*)

There may be time.

Hugo, away and save thy friend from death.

Mine was the hand which struck the fatal blow,

(*To Venetia.*)

That robb'd thee, lady, of a father's care.

I'd sought of him thy hand which he refused:

And when my blood was hot with rage I met him,

And, mocking at him, gave him a vile blow.

He drew a dagger to defend himself,

Which, wresting from his feeble grasp, I struck

Home to his heart;—then, awed with sudden fear,

I left the weapon reeking in the wound

And cast away the sheath, which Cludio found.

He is most innocent.

Venetia, (passionately.)

Did ye hear that?

Tell me, my lords, did all of ye hear that?

Did I not tell ye he was innocent?

There still is time: Hugo, away, away!

Lorenzo, (faintly.)

Help me within, Pescara: I shall faint!

Forgive me, lady, for—

(*Extending his hand to VENETIA.*)

Venetia. I do, I do!

But still my father's blood is on thy hands—

(*She averts her head, and exit PESCARA and DANDOLO,*

supporting LORENZO.)

Venetia, (to Hugo.)

Lend me thy signet-ring; speak not a word,

But speed thee on thy way!

(*Exit HUGO.*)

(*To Antonio.*)

Haste to the Doge

And tell him what thou heard'st Lorenzo say,

And bear this ring as witness to thy truth.

(ANTONIO takes the ring and exit.)

How fast the sky doth brighten up with light,

(She looks fearfully round.)

As tho' the Sun did lash his coursers on,

Striving with Hugo in this fearful race.

(She looks after HUGO.)

Faster, good Hugo! 'Tis for Clodio's life—

Thy friend's existence,—faster, faster, faster!

(Exit speaking, with faltering steps after HUGO and straining her eyes after him.)

SCENE II.—*The Square of Saint Mark. Time sunrise. CLODIO, FRANGIPANI, FRIAR and GUARDS.—The wheel and executioner in the back ground.*

Alberto. There comes the sun, my lord.

Clodio. Aye, Frangipani:

The last that ever I shall look upon.

How splendidly he marches up the sky,
As tho' exulting proudly in the thought,
His advent is my death ; o'er half the earth
His kindling beams are waking joy and hope,
While me they plunge into an endless night.
'Tis a hard fate.

Alberto. Thou dost not fear to die ?

Clodio, (indignantly.)

No, by Saint Mark, I do not fear to die !
Let me but feel my war-steed's fiery tramp,
But give me my good sword, and place me where
The thund'ring battle drives its bloody course,—
And never bridegroom sprang to meet his bride
As I should leap to death,—a warrior's death !
I do not fear to die !—but I had hop'd
The blasts of trumpets should my requiem be,
And banners, torn by war's rude hand, my shroud.
Here I shall suffer all the pangs of death
A hundred fold—

Alberto. It is the third and last:

My lord, prepare for death.

Clodio. I am prepar'd:

My peace is made with heav'n and earth.

(*He throws off his cloak.*)

Executioner. My lord,

You will forgive me for my share in this?

Clodio. Thou? Thou art nothing but the instrument.

Take this, my friend, and do thy duty well.

(*He gives him his purse.*)

Now heav'n grant me firmness! Venetia—

Life, love and hope—farewell!

(*He ascends the platform and the Executioner binds
him to the wheel.*)

Friar, (*elevating the crucifix.*)

My son, my son,

Look to this blessed symbol of his pangs

Who perish'd for thy sins.

(*Enter HUGO breathless.*)

Hugo, (rushing forwards.)

Hold, on your lives !

(*He throws the Executioner aside, cuts Cludio's bonds with his dagger, and throwing his arms around him, draws him forwards.*)

Hugo. Thank God, I am in time.

(*ALBERTO and the GUARDS, close up around them threateningly.*)

Alberto, (to Hugo.)

In time, my lord ?

How wilt thou answer this unto the Senate?

Hugo, (breathlessly.)

I am so spent with speed, I scarce can speak.

I'll answer for it with his innocence,

Which heav'n has made as plain as yon fair light.

Lorenzo—he of Arpa—he confess'd :

My sword still blushes with the villain's blood !—

Why how now, Cladio ? Art thou ill that thus

The blood forsakes thy cheeks ?

Cludio, (faintly and leaning on Hugo.)

'Tis over now :

Prais'd be Saint Mark, our 'scutcheon still is pure.

(He endeavors to stand upright.)

Hugo. Nay, nay ! lean on me still ; the beaded drops
Are cold upon thy brow, and all thy frame
Is trembling from this mighty stroke of joy.

Cludio, (recovering.)

I do assure thee I am strong again :

Indeed, I need no help : I am no woman
To be o'ermaster'd by excess of joy.

Where is Venetia ? how is her dear health
And knows she these glad tidings ?

Hugo. Aye, my friend ;

She had them from Lorenzo's fainting lips,
And, mindless of herself, did speed me on
To intercept thy doom.

Alberto. Here comes the Doge.

Hugo. In fiery haste, yet hardly haste enough
For such a narrow chance.

(Enter DOGE: *he advances to Clodio and takes his hand.*)

Doge. Thou art, then, safe.

Thanks be to Heaven, Clodio, thou art safe.
Ourself did come in hot speed from our palace
Quick as we hear'd the tidings of the morn.
Hugo, we thank thee for thy care in this.

Friar, (solemnly.)

Nay, thank thy God, for 'twas *his* mighty hand
Outstretch'd to save!

Doge, (reverently and taking off his cap.)

To *his* name be the glory.

(To Alberto.)

Let the “Te Deum” rise from ev’ry church,
And let all Venice don her best attire;
We’d have this day a solemn festival,
And we, ourself, in solemn state will go
To render up thanksgiving for the grace

Which has spared Venice such a henious crime.

Make proclamation of this throughout all—

(*Venetia totters in : she stretches her arms towards Clodio, who saves her from falling by springing forwards and catching her in his arms : she weeps.*)

Clodio. Look up, look up, Venetia : I am free :
The night hath pass'd, my love, and all the clouds,
Which frown'd upon our bliss, have fled away
Before the joyful dawn. My own sweet love,
In the tumultuous throbbing of thy heart
I hear a thousand seraph voices sing
The chorus of my joy ; nay, why these tears ?

Venetia. Oh Clodio, let them flow : they are the dews
That morn reveals when sorrow's night is past.
In the sad time which bound my brain with fire
I could not shed these tears ; so let them flow.

Clodio. And art thou happy now ?

Venetia. Ah, canst thou ask ?

Art thou not safe and art thou not to me
The earthly sum of all my happiness?

(Enter PESCARA and DANDOLO.)

Pescara. Lorenzo's dead!

Doge. Thus died a wicked man.

Venetia. May gentle heav'n mind his late repentence
And pardon him his sin.

Clodio. Amen, Venetia.

An hour ago, he triumph'd in his evil
While I came forth to death: now he lies cold
And life and joy are smiling on my path.
Thus in disaster, never let despair
Beat down the spirit, wrestling with its fate:
But on the future fix a dauntless eye
And firmly trust to Honor, Truth—

Venetia. And Love.

Wheel and Executioner.

GUARDS.

DOGE, VENETIA, CLODIO, HUGO.

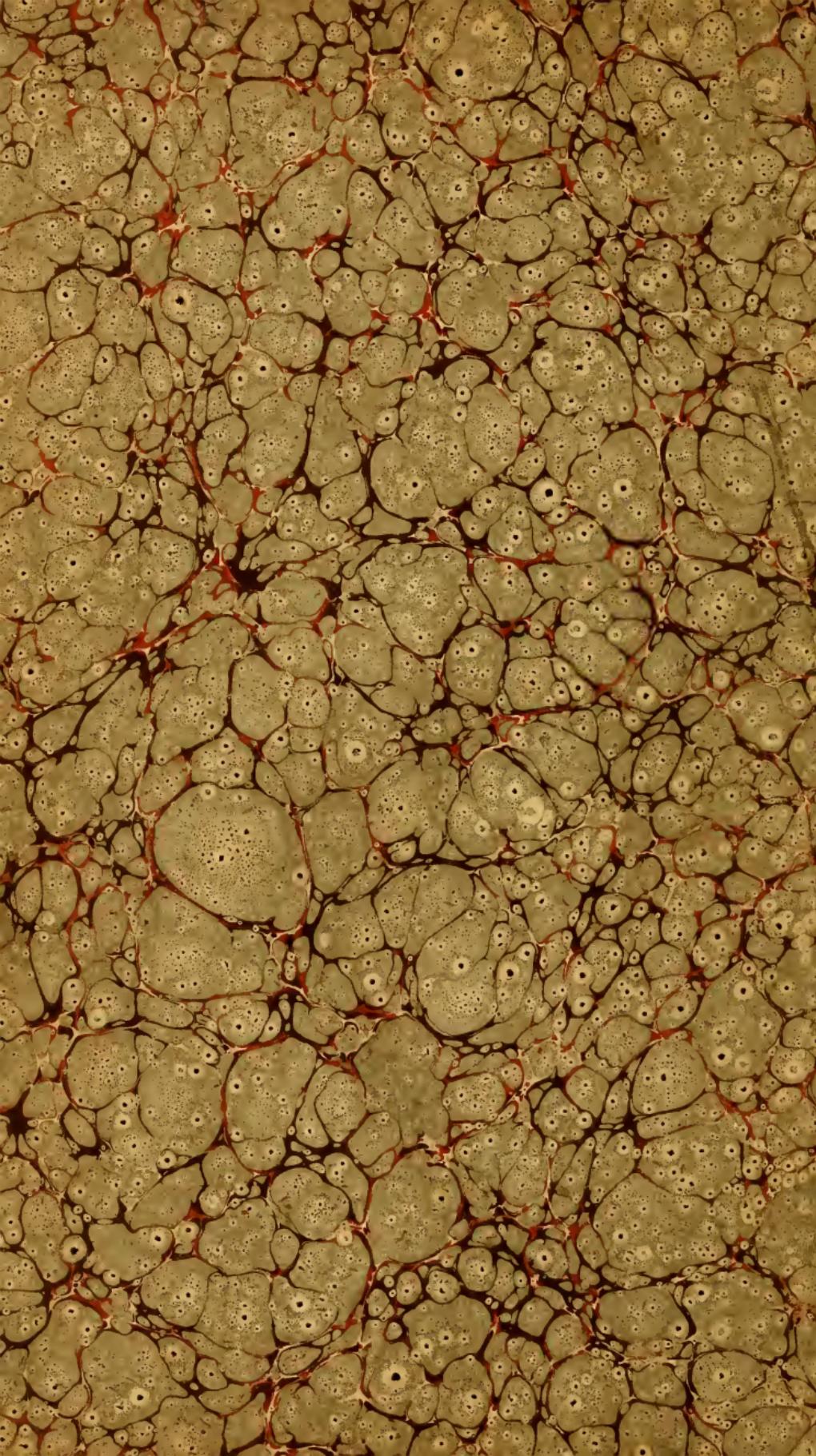
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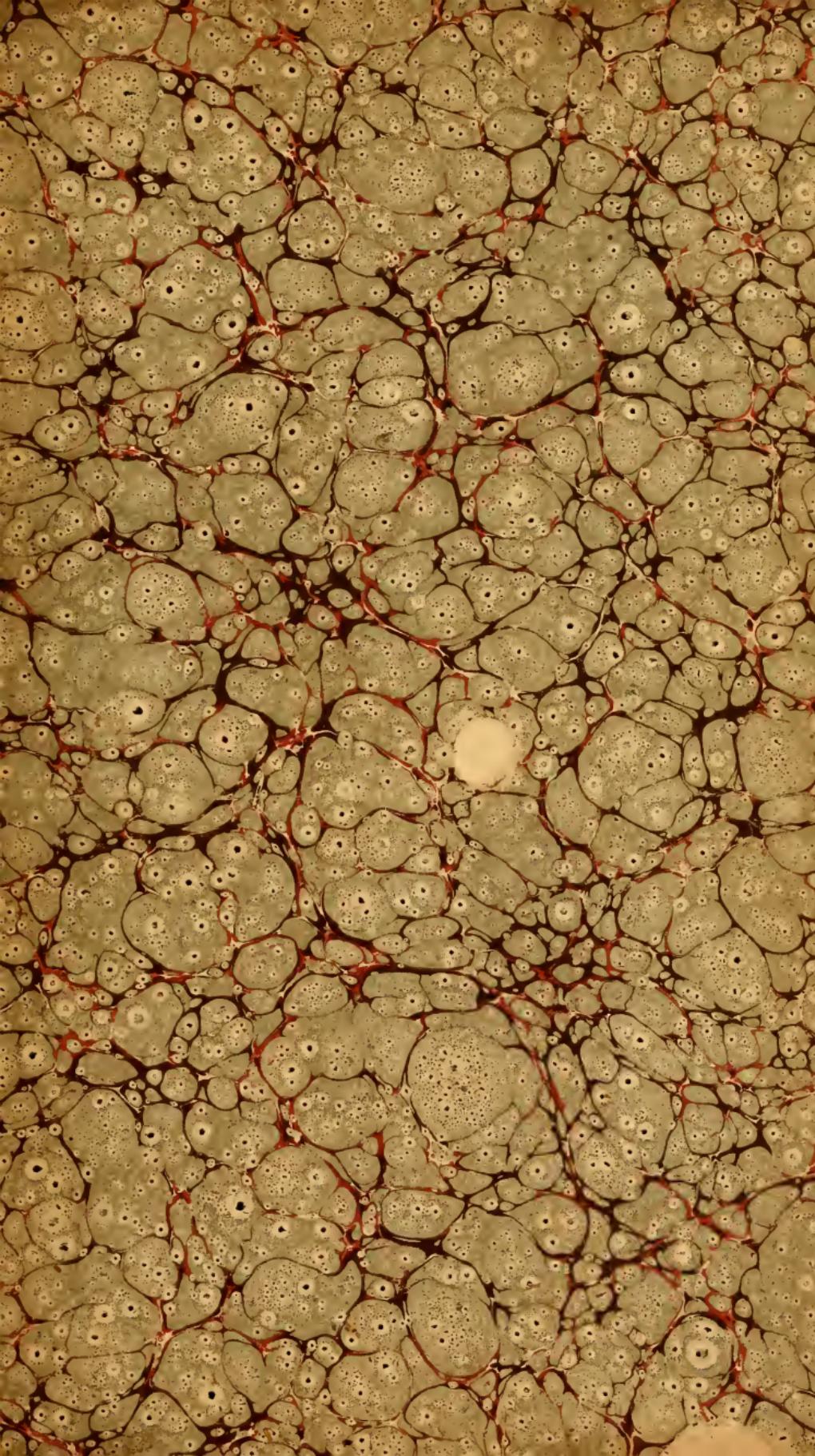
FRIAR.

GUARDS.

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